DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 917 CG 004 923

AUTHOR [illegible], HORTON C.; SOUTHARD, HELEN.
TITLE PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY.
INSTITUTION AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, CHICAGO, ILL.; NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.
PUB DATE 67
NOTE 51P.
AVAILABLE FROM AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, 535 NORTH DEARBORN STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60610 ($.30 PER SINGLE COPY; 50-99, $.28 EACH; 100-499, $.25 EACH; 500-999, $.23 EACH; 1,000 OR MORE, $.20 EACH)

EDRS PRICE [illegible] MF-$0.25 HC NOT AVAILABLE FROM EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS [illegible]DULT EDUCATION, *ATTITUDES, CHILD DEVELOPMENT, *COMMUNICATION (THOUGHT TRANSFER), LEARNING, PARENT EDUCATION, *PARENT PARTICIPATION, *SELF CONCEPT, SEX (CHARACTERISTICS), *SEX EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

THIS PAMPHLET IS WRITTEN FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN OF PRESCHOOL AND EARLY SCHOOL AGE. CHAPTER ONE IS CONCERNED WITH SEX EDUCATION AND INCLUDES DISCUSSION ON TOPICS SUCH AS: (1) THE IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION FROM INFANCY ON; AND (2) THE EXPERIENCES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO SEX EDUCATION. CHAPTER TWO GIVES HELP TO PARENTS ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS: (1) SOURCES OF INFORMATION; (2) THE FATHER'S ROLE; (3) HOW TO USE BASIC INFORMATION; AND (4) PARENTS FEELING RIGHT ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN. SOME ASPECTS OF CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT ARE PRESENTED IN CHAPTER THREE. THE NEXT CHAPTER DISCUSSES THE SETTING FOR TALKING ABOUT SEX: (1) ENCOURAGE TWO-WAY TALK; (2) SEX QUESTIONS COME WHEN COMMUNICATION LINES ARE OPEN; AND (3) PARENTS DO NOT NEED TO BE THE PERFECT TEACHER. CHAPTER FIVE LISTS SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING SOME COMMON QUESTIONS AND SITUATIONS. THIS CHAPTER IS DIVIDED INIC TWO PARTS. THE FIRST PART IS ON QUESTIONS CHILDREN ASK, INCLUDING THOSE ON BIRTH, AND THE FATHER'S PART. THE SECOND PART IS ON PARENTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING VOCABULARY, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS, AND SEX PLAY. A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY IS GIVEN. (KJ)

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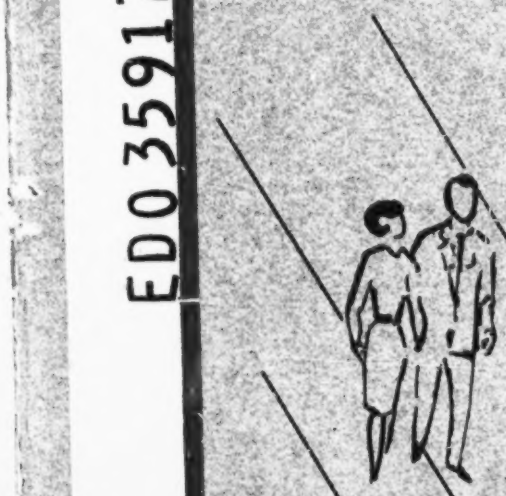

# parents' responsibility

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# parents' responsibility

*Prepared for the Joint Committee on Health Problems in Education of the National Education Association and the American Medical Association*

*by*
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Anatomical drawings based on diagrams from *The Gift of Life*,
published by Health Education Service, Albany, New York

This series of pamphlets is prepared to help parents and those other adults who may have responsibility and concern in assisting children to form sound ideas and attitudes about family living, including sex education.

The Joint Committee on Health Problems in Education of the National Education Association and the American Medical Association publishes this series. We believe the home is the ideal place for sex education of children and youth. It is also recognized that many parents consider it desirable for the church, the school, or other responsible groups in the community to supplement this education. Thus, the ways in which this series is used will of necessity be dependent upon the judgment of individual parents and of local community groups. This focus of responsibility must be honored and these booklets must in no instance be used without full approval and joint planning from home, school and community.

**SEX EDUCATION SERIES**

**PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY,** for parents of young children of preschool and early school age.

**A STORY ABOUT YOU,** for children in grades 4, 5, and 6.

**FINDING YOURSELF,** for boys and girls of approximately junior high school age.

**APPROACHING ADULTHOOD,** for young people of both sexes (about 16 to 20 years of age).

**FACTS AREN'T ENOUGH,** for adults who have any responsibility for children or youth that may create a need for an understanding of sex education.

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Chapter 1

# WHAT IS SEX EDUCATION?

## Sex Education Important from Infancy On

Many people think of sex education as a much-dreaded task that parents must face when their children reach the age of puberty or are contemplating marriage. Some parents refer to it as the "job of the school," or "the responsibility of the church." A few completely ignore their responsibility and forfeit the opportunity of guiding their children in wholesome attitudes toward family living. Fortunately, there are many other parents who deem the daily sharing of their children's lives a blessing and a privilege. These parents love and cherish their children, guiding them in many of the early experiences that can make sex education a sound education.

Some of these typical early experiences are described in this pamphlet. The anecdotes reported are true experiences with fictitious names. Many of them describe situations that are so widespread as to form the basis for discussions in parent groups throughout the country. One could begin with the story of Harry and Barbara.



Young Harry, aged seven, and his five-year-old sister Barbara were calling on their next-door neighbor.

"We're going to a wedding!" Barbara squealed in excitement.

"Miss Olsen, she's my Sunday-school teacher, she's getting married Saturday. She invited my mother and my father and me and Barbara!" Harry added proudly.

"We helped Mummy make strawberry preserves all day, and we're going to give some to Miss Olsen for a wedding present," Barbara chattered. "And we made a tiny, tiny little glass of preserves for the baby."

"She hasn't got the baby yet," Harry interrupted.

"But she can give the preserves to the baby when she gets him," Barbara concluded.

Although Harry and Barbara may not have been entirely clear about the relationship of weddings to the arrival of babies, there was no doubt in their minds that the two events were connected. When their mother heard of the incident, she gave a little sigh. "I suppose

I ought to begin to explain about babies and things," she murmured. "They'll be getting ideas if I don't."



## Many Experiences Contribute to Sex Education

In fact, Harry and Barbara already had "ideas" about babies. Regardless of information that may have been given or withheld by their parents, their experience of life itself had begun their sex education. Even a child's world is full of interesting circumstances or exciting events growing out of the fact that the human race is made of two sexes. Mothers are different from fathers; brothers are different from sisters; men and women get married, and the whole neighborhood loves a wedding; new babies arrive somehow, causing great excitement. In this sense, the sex education of a child begins inevitably at an early age, whether or not his parents wish it, or do anything about it. Left to himself or to the tutelage of his playmates, the child may acquire ideas that are fantastic, confused, or entirely untrue, but no parent need expect that his child's mind will long remain a blank page as to sex.

Many parents who are eager to help their children form ideas about sex that are true and good are uncertain how to do it. An

awareness of the fact that daily life is full of natural opportunities for sex education may make their task easier. For example, the arrival of a new baby in the home, or even in the neighborhood, is one of the common experiences through which children may learn a number of things about sex.

Before Jimmy was born, his three-year-old sister Mary was much interested when she was told that a new baby was growing in her mother's body. After the baby was born, she always wanted to watch her mother bathe the new baby, and she liked to help with the diapering by bringing the clean diapers. She naturally became used to the anatomy of a little boy. Mary often watched the baby feed, sometimes at his mother's breast, and sometimes from a bottle. From these and other daily experiences, she learned something about the loving care that parents give a baby. Sex information came gradually and naturally through her experiences with her baby brother, and her mother's simple answers to her questions.

Sometimes a child's experiences relating to sex education are far from welcome to parents. Yet parents who are prepared to do so may find opportunity for education in sex even in a dismaying incident, or they may at least minimize its undesirable effects. Mrs. Evans, who had moved recently to a new community, found that in the neighboring Wilson family there were five little girls aged 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8, but no boys. The little girls were brought up rather strictly, and their parents protected them from playing with rough children, but they often came to play with Mrs. Evans' three-year-old son, Jimmy. She began to notice that when he came in from play, his clothes were not tucked in, or fastened as they were when he went out. He sometimes told her that the girls had removed some of his clothing. Although she spoke to the girls pleasantly and asked them not to remove any of Jimmy's clothing, they continued the disrobing. One day Mrs. Evans said to the children, "If you girls are taking off Jimmy's clothing because you want to see what a boy looks like, I'd rather you came at bath time and looked!" That evening at five o'clock, the little girls appeared at the door. Mrs. Evans was out and they were told, "Jimmy can't play out anymore. He's going to have his bath." The oldest girl replied, "Yes, we know. That's why we came. We want to see him get his bath."

When Mrs. Evans' story was told to a group of parents, their response to it brought forth a variety of remarks which included the following: "The little boy should have been forbidden to play with girls." "Why didn't the boy's father go to the girls' family and tell

them a thing or two?" "The boy's mother should never have suggested that girls watch little boys in a bath." "Those aren't normal children. Most boys and girls don't do things like that." "I can understand why those girls wanted to see him. They probably never saw a little boy." "I never could have been so calm. I'd have been furious."

Many parents can sympathize with Mrs. Evans, for they have found their own little children playing "doctor" or some other game in which clothes are removed. The good thing about Mrs. Evans' actions was her calm way of taking the situation without making any of the children feel that they had done something wrong.

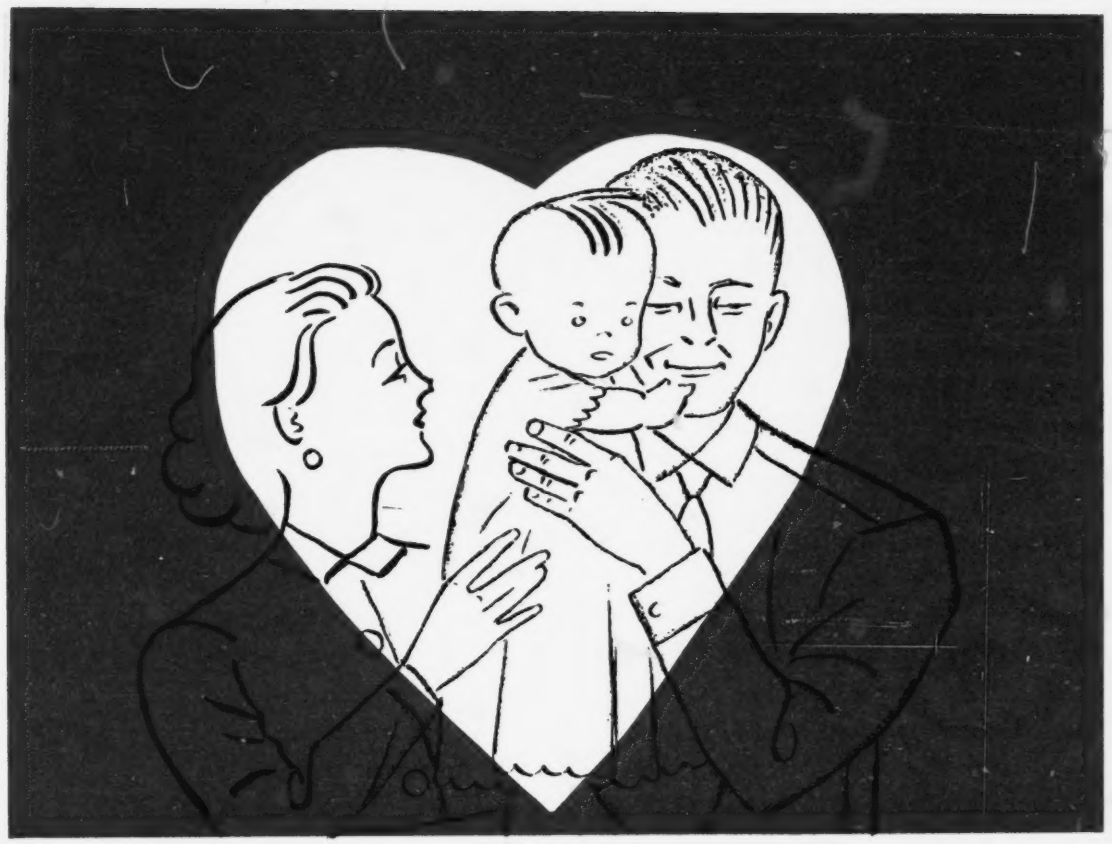
If parents understand how children grow and develop, mentally as well as physically, they may be able to take such incidents calmly, and may even use them as an opportunity to clear up unanswered questions in the child's mind. A child's curiosity is a lively thing, and his curiosity about human bodies is akin to his interest in all that is new, hidden, strange, or forbidden; it does not indicate a perverted sexual development. Even little children soon learn that body play is exciting. Parents usually need to promote some other kind of play activity in order to keep children from getting overstimulated and perhaps worried about what they may have done.



The preceding true stories can tell us several things about sex education. They point out that children's experiences give them some kind of sex education early in life whether parents wish it or not. They show us that sex education is more than answering children's questions about where babies come from, important though that question is. They tell us that sex education is also concerned with children's behavior, and with some of the reasons why children act as they do at different ages and at different stages in their life. They show us, too, that some adults are more calm about sex situations among children than are others. We can readily see as we look over these stories that sex education is only one part of a broader family life education that goes on from infancy to maturity, and that parents need sound information about marriage, parenthood, child guidance, and health in order to provide useful sex education for their children.

## Love Is Basic

Parents who are struggling to find one easy formula for good sex education need to be told that there is no ready-made, universal method. At the same time they need assurance that their great



capacity to love both their marriage partner and their children is the very essence of good sex education. Love and respect for one another characterize a good home where meaningful sex education can occur.

We hear repeatedly nowadays about a *basic* recipe, a *basic* formula, a *basic* gown to which can be added individual touches. There is also a *basic* core in sex education. This core is the continued, reassuring love that parents, or others who have children in their care, give to boys and girls. With this love, there can be many individual variations in techniques used in sex education and child rearing.



Affection is indicated to the very young baby by the way it is held and cuddled and by the facial expressions of the parents or their tone of voice. Administering to a child's physical needs, giving care when he is ill, being with him when he needs companionship and attention, and, finally, comforting him in his sorrows and sharing enthusiastically in his happy experiences—all these communicate love.

Each child needs to be understood and loved for the person he is, for he is different from his brothers, or his sisters, or his cousins, or his playmates. Wise parents will make sure that each child knows that he is loved, and will show their affection for each child in ways that satisfy his own special needs. Some parents express their love in words, others in deeds.

A warm, steady, dependable love will also lead parents to encourage their children to do things for themselves. The sensible mother shows her love by letting the baby feed himself when he is ready to do it, instead of "helping" him so much that he loses interest in learning to feed himself. She lets the little child begin to dress himself when he is interested in learning how to put on his clothes, even if dressing takes longer and is harder for her. In the end, her love is more useful to him if she lets him learn to do things for himself. A child's satisfaction in accomplishment aids his own capacity to love and receive love from others.

Fathers and mothers need to remember that a useful love is not a smothering affection which may indicate the parents' own need for affection. Nor is it an inconsistent, unpredictable affection which is doled out only when a child distinguishes himself in some manner. Useful love is smooth, steady, and evident to children at both high and low moments of the day. It does not mean that parents must never direct or control their children.

Mrs. Brown loved little Jenny, hugged and patted her, and called her "honey" whenever she brought home a school paper with a star, or when she was praised by her mother's friends for her wonderful manners or her skill in dancing. One day, though, when she found Jenny undressed and her girl friend playing "doctor" with her, her mother said, "I'm so ashamed of you! How can I love a little girl who is so naughty?" Since Jenny was never quite sure how any new game or escapade would be received by her mother, she grew very anxious about her play activity, and about her school work too, for doing well in school meant that she was sure of a show of affection from her mother.



Without interpretation by loving and understanding parents, sex facts can have little meaning for a young child, and occasionally they can even be frightening. Pictures intended to show the development of a baby in its mother sometimes look as though the mother were cut open across the front of her body. Such pictures need adult explanation. When sexual intercourse is interpreted to children by other young friends, it is generally unrelated to love. These childish interpretations can arouse unusual sex curiosity in a child, or fear that bodily injury can occur to the mother. Even books may be disturbing to a young child unless the parents can help their child to understand new meanings.

Johnny, a seven-year-old, was being read a story in which there was a picture of a very tiny egg cell, barely visible. As he listened

to the text which told how he was once that small, he said, "I don't want to be that little spot. Let's not read that anymore. It's sort of scary." All of these experiences with sex education point up the need for the parents to be aware of the child's feelings and to reassure him whenever possible.

Love is so desirable and so necessary that some children on occasions ask for extra amounts by feigning illness that will bring evidence of parental love. Even in later childhood, some children occasionally soil themselves or in other ways seem to go back to early childhood, almost as though they were asking for the old way of receiving affection. These situations form some of the knotty problems of child rearing.

No one can hope to be a perfect parent at all times, but everyone can try to make use of his own good judgment and the resources that are available in the community.

Chapter 2

# HOW CAN PARENTS PREPARE THEMSELVES?

## As to Sources of Information and Help

Present day parents have easy access to much information and counsel that can help make families healthy and homes happier places in which to live. Books, magazines, pamphlets and newspapers contain a variety of materials and special articles, some written by the "experts," and there is every reason to believe that parents keep reading this material because they want to keep improving their homemaking skills.

Those who wish to broaden their knowledge of parenthood can do so in other ways than through reading. Parent-Teacher organizations, youth agencies, and church groups are only a few of the community agencies that have films, lectures, and discussion groups on family life education, including sex education. At times, parents need special help, and they should then consult their family physician, or family agencies in the community.



Parents sometimes remark that there is so much material available that they do not know how to take hold of much that they hear and read. They say that with the book in one hand, the child in the other, they sometimes fail to get the well-integrated product that was described to them. Some parents blame "the experts" and some blame themselves, or the child, when a new idea fails to work. Probably confusion is bound to occur when, in eagerness for what is new, and in overconfidence that the new will be right, we try out too many different ideas. Some "first steps" will be suggested later in this chapter that may help parents to avoid such confusion in guiding their child's sex education.

## Fathers Care, Too

More and more fathers are becoming interested in the rearing of their children. They are reading literature about child health and guidance, are participating in community programs on family life, and are more and more sharing in homemaking activities within

their own homes. This participation of fathers in family life helps immeasurably in providing a unified approach to living within a family. For too many years, mothers carried on the search for new knowledge alone, and bore the full burden when experiments with new ideas caused confusion in family life.

Children want and need to watch and imitate each parent, and each parent has a necessary role to play in helping his children develop ideas of father and mother.



The role that each parent plays in family life today is not so sharply defined as it was at the turn of the century. Traditionally mothers used to "stay home," cook, sew, and perform other clearly defined household tasks, whereas fathers traditionally worked to support the family and enjoyed leisure upon returning home.

Today home life shows a mixture of these roles. Children are becoming accustomed to seeing mother leave the house for full or part-time work and for a heavy schedule of community service. They may see father help with household tasks, take over the care of the baby, or do the major part of the shopping for the family. Some schools even instruct boys in homemaking and girls in manual training.

Confusion about the role of father and mother need not arise if families share responsibilities amiably and interpret fairly to children any activities which are at variance with neighborhood or community standards.

## Sex Education Begins at Home

When sound ideas, or attitudes, as they are also called, about marriage and parenthood are evident in adolescent years, then early sex education has been successful. Many authorities would go so far as to say that sex education is only as good as the attitudes it develops in a child about family life, about marriage, about babies, about other boys and girls, about the way love is expressed, and about one's own body. This kind of learning extends over a period of years. If a child fails to get a fact, it will not be nearly so serious as if he gets a wrong attitude about sex.

If we stop to think about where these attitudes must be learned, there can be little question that sex education must logically begin at home. If facts alone were necessary, then school training and book learning might be a substitute for parents.

Unfortunately, there has been too much identification of sex education with extensive factual information about how the body functions. Many parents will say, "I knew nothing when I was a child, and I want my child to know EVERYTHING!" Their thoughts then turn mainly to a book that will give detailed information. Facts, like certain foods, are good in moderation and in combination with other needed elements.

Sometimes there is an overdependence upon the written word because parents feel unqualified to explain physiological facts about reproduction. These parents need to understand two things. First, sex information useful to a child is often not given through either the written or spoken word, but rather is conveyed by the way one acts toward the child or marriage partner. Second, giving factual material in answer to young children's questions need not be difficult if parents know some simple basic material and can talk about it easily.



## Learning How to Use the Basic Information

The first step for parents as they prepare themselves to guide young children in sex education is to learn some simple, basic facts about the human body, and to learn how to speak easily about this material. Skill can be acquired by practice. Husbands and wives should talk about these facts to each other. They might attend discussions in PTA study groups or in other agency programs. As one becomes more familiar with physiological material, he usually acquires greater ease in talking about the subject.

Doctors and nurses, for example, are more frank and at home with

physiological facts than most persons are because of wide experience with talking about the human body. Use of correct terms for parts of the body associated with reproduction, such as buttocks, navel, penis, and so forth, can help one be more objective and unemotional about sex education. Use of these terms should begin when the first baby is very small. A parent needs to hear his own voice speaking these words. Parents to whom they are unfamiliar will want to begin gradually to use these terms.

Almost all mothers converse with their babies in an effortless way. At bath time, for example, they may say "Let me wash those dirty little hands and your sticky little face. Now we do the back and a big rinse and you'll be clean and shiny in a jiffy." Mothers who have practiced using the terms buttocks, penis, navel, and so forth as they bathe or dress their babies report that they have lost self-consciousness as they heard their own voices use these words.

Of course parents should not insist that their young children use all the correct terms for parts of their body. If children know that there are other terms than their own childish ones and that their parents are not ashamed to use them, they, too, will come naturally to give up nursery words and use more grown-up words.

These terms, and the correct pronunciation, are given in the following few paragraphs, which contain much of the information that an adult needs to know in order to answer a young child's questions about birth, about how he is made, and about the anatomical differences that exist between the sexes.



Even though parents may have read materials on human reproduction at some time in the past, they may find it difficult to recall specific facts. Mothers and fathers often say that they profited by reading material written for young persons because a short, simple review of basic facts aided in the recall of information they had learned earlier. Other pamphlets in this series contain physiological material prepared for teen-agers and adults* which will be useful to parents who want to refresh their memories. The following pages contain a brief review of some elementary facts about human reproduction that mothers and fathers can rephrase in their own words as they talk with their children about birth. Much material has been purposely omitted in order to interpret anatomy, conception and birth in the light of what the young child of three to eight or nine might need to know.

*Pamphlet No. 4: Approaching Adulthood.
Pamphlet No. 5: Facts Aren't Enough.

Early questions of young children are usually about the mother's part in reproduction. Children of approximately three to five may ask "Where did I come from?" or "Where did the new baby come from?" It is difficult to suggest material appropriate for different age groups, for there are wide variations in the maturity of children. For example, many children are not ready to learn of the father's part in reproduction until the age of eight or nine, but some six-year-olds may ask for this information and be able to understand it. Fathers and mothers are the best judge of how much information to give their own children. One would not give all of this information at once to a young child unless his questions definitely indicated that he was ready for it all at one time, and this is unlikely! On page 34 of this pamphlet there is a section on children's questions about sex. The following paragraphs contain factual material which all parents should know before they attempt to answer children's questions.

### About the baby's growth in the mother

The name of the special place in which the baby grows and develops during the nine month period of pregnancy is called the womb or *uterus* (ū′ tẽr ŭs). It is a pear-shaped, hollow organ well below the stomach. A sac filled with fluid is formed around the baby in the uterus, and this fluid keeps the baby from being bumped in a harmful way. The thick, muscular walls of the uterus stretch to allow the baby to grow larger. During birth they also contract and so help to push the full-grown baby on its way along a special passage, the *vagina* (vå jī′ nå) or birth canal. The vagina stretches, too, to allow the baby to move down to the outside opening of the vagina which is between the mother's legs. The baby is born through this opening, usually head first, although healthy babies can be born in other positions.



### About the baby's food and air

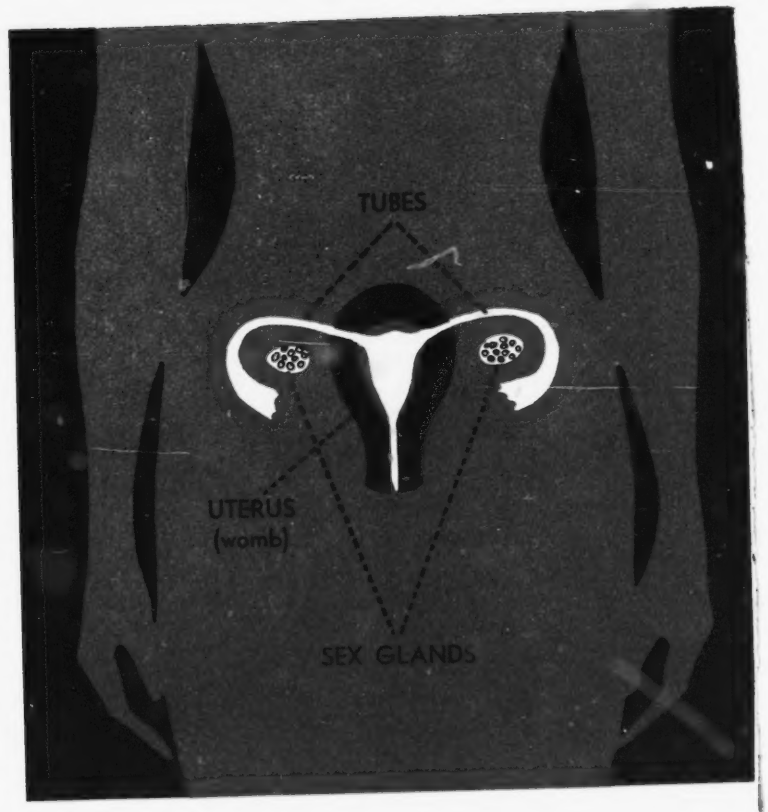
A child may ask how the baby breathes and eats when it is in the mother. This question is especially likely to be asked after a child has learned that the baby is surrounded by a fluid. The baby does not need to eat through his mouth nor breathe through his nose during the time that he is growing in his mother, for there is a special arrangement by which the mother's blood supplies him with

the kind of food and the part of the air (i.e. oxygen) that he needs. The baby is attached to the inside of the mother's uterus by a cord that has some of the baby's blood vessels in it. The cord is attached to the baby's body at the place where his navel will be. At the place where the cord is fastened to the mother's uterus there is a special network of blood vessels where the baby's and the mother's blood vessels are close together. This network is called the *placenta* (plă-sĕn′ tă). Here food elements filter through from the mother's blood vessels into the baby's blood vessels. The part of the air that the baby needs also filters from her blood vessels into his. After a baby is born the placenta, or afterbirth, comes away too.



### About the mother's breasts

There may be questions about breast feeding of babies. Children are interested to know that soon after a baby is born, the mother's breasts begin to provide milk for the new baby. However, children may observe that some infants are fed by a bottle, while others feed at the mother's breasts. When the child asks questions about this, he can be told that some babies do not get enough milk from their mothers and need to be bottle-fed part or all of the time.



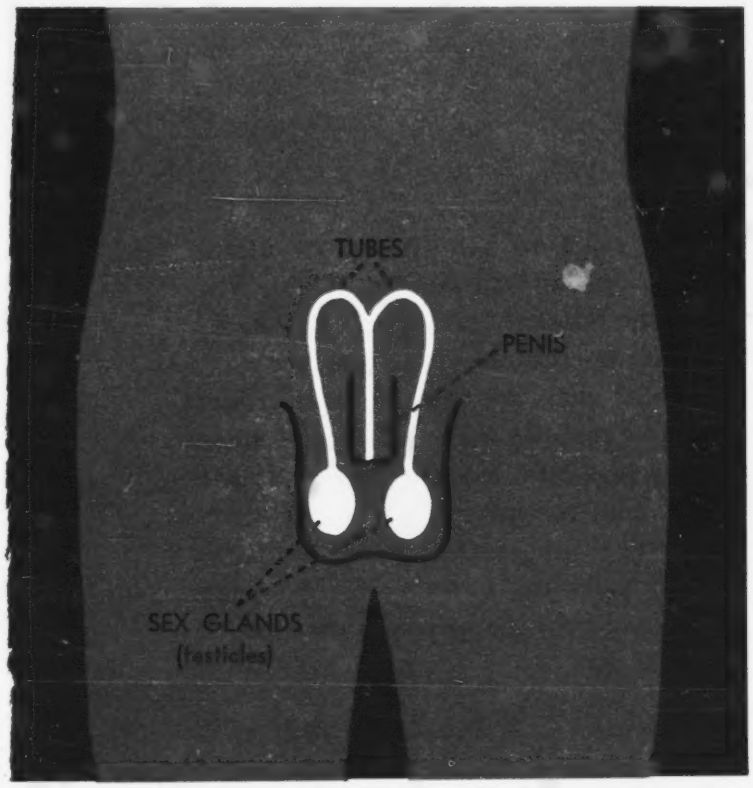

**About egg cells**

Many young children do not ask for details about how life started; they may ask more general questions about the place where the baby was just before birth and how it was able to get out. However, parents will want to refresh their memories about *ovulation* (ō′ vů-lā′ shun) or the development of egg cells, for as children observe the eggs of birds, fish or turtles they may ask if they came from an egg. Children who have asked repeatedly only how babies get out of the mother may become curious about how the life started in the first place.



Parents will recall that in the woman's body there are two *ovaries* (ō′ vå rĭz), one on either side of the uterus. They are about the size of an almond nut and house thousands of tiny eggs. When a baby girl is born the ovaries are already in her body with partly grown cells in each ovary. Most girls are about twelve or thirteen years old when the ovaries begin to change the partly grown egg cells into egg cells that are fully grown. About once each month a fully grown egg cell leaves one or the other of the ovaries and travels into a tube that opens near the ovary. There is a tube for each of the two ovaries, and these serve as a connection between the ovaries and the uterus. Each month when an egg cell leaves an ovary, the uterus provides an extra thick lining rich in blood that the egg cell can use if it grows into a baby.

Some children ask detailed questions about how often a mother has a baby. This is especially likely to occur if earlier questions have




brought forth the information that about once a month an egg leaves the ovary. Johnny, at the age of eight, asked his mother the following question shortly after he had learned about the function of ovaries. "If you don't get a baby every month when an egg comes away then what happens to the egg that doesn't make the baby?" A simple explanation of menstruation can be given by using parts of the following physiological material.



### About menstruation

If the egg from the ovary is not fertilized (or if the child has not yet learned of the father's part in reproduction one can say "if the egg has not yet made a baby"), it breaks up and later leaves the body through the vagina along with blood and mucus that was not needed. This discharge is called *menstruation* (mĕn strŏŏ ā′ shun). Most eggs are not fertilized (or do not make babies).

When the child is ready to learn the father's part in reproduction, the information should be simple and clear. See page 38 for a discussion of children's questions about this subject. The following physiological facts can be used in the explanations one gives to the child.

### About sperm cells

The cell that makes it possible for a woman's egg cell to grow into a baby comes from the man's body. These male cells are called

sperm cells or *spermatozoa* (spûr′ mȧ tō zō′ ȧ). They grow in the fȧther's body in two special places called *testicles* (tĕs′ tĭ kls). The testicles are in a sac of skin called the *scrotum* (skrō′ tŭm) that hangs between the legs of boys and men on the outside of the body.

The sperm cells are much smaller than the egg cells and cannot be seen without a microscope. The testicles make millions of these cells. They are shaped something like little tadpoles, bigger at one end, with slender wiggly tails. The sperm cells leave the body through the male sex organ which is the *penis* (pē′ nĭs). When a baby boy is born he already has testicles and a penis. However, the testicles are not ready to make fully grown sperm cells until a boy is about thirteen or fourteen years of age.

### About fertilization

When the father's penis fits into the vagina of the mother, the sperm cells from the father leave the penis in a liquid and can enter the uterus and swim on into the tubes. The liquid and the sperm cells together are called *semen* (sē′ mĕn). If there is an egg cell in one of the tubes, a sperm cell can unite with it. This union of the two cells makes a fertilized egg cell. If an egg is fertilized it moves along into the uterus where it stays while it is growing into a baby. A sperm cell does not find an egg each time spermatozoa enter the mother's vagina.



If one knows the preceding material, and is able to talk about it

to his children, he can answer most questions that young children ask about sex. If an unusual question arises requiring specialized information, then the parent should not hesitate to say, "You know, I don't know too much about that. Let's look it up in a book right now." Parents will want to have a few good reference books available. Some are listed on page 47. Books are useful for the parents' own use, for their use in reading to children, and for children who can read for themselves, but books alone cannot give adequate sex instruction.

## Parents Need to Feel Right About Themselves

How a parent feels about himself is important. Adults come to the privilege and responsibility of mating and child rearing with a background of their own. They, too, had childhood experiences which helped them feel the way they do about sex. Some parents feel guilty about sexual behavior, and avoid discussions of the subject. Some are overly interested in sex and talk too much about it. Again,

some persons don't understand how they feel, and may have forgotten some of their own early sex experiences, even though their behavior is influenced by them.

For example, a mother who was brought up to believe that birth must be whispered about may continue to have an air of secrecy in relation to her own children even as she tries to be matter of fact about natural events, such as birth in household pets. Mrs. Andrews tried to give good sex education, but she had been brought up in a home where there was an air of secrecy about birth. When she told her five year old son that Boots, the dog, was going to have puppies, she said, "It is a great secret between you and me. We mustn't tell anyone. There is a special way that she will have the puppies, but that is our secret." Her words and tone of voice conveyed the idea that there was something unmentionable about reproduction. It would have been better if Mrs. Andrews had assumed that her son would talk about the expected puppies.

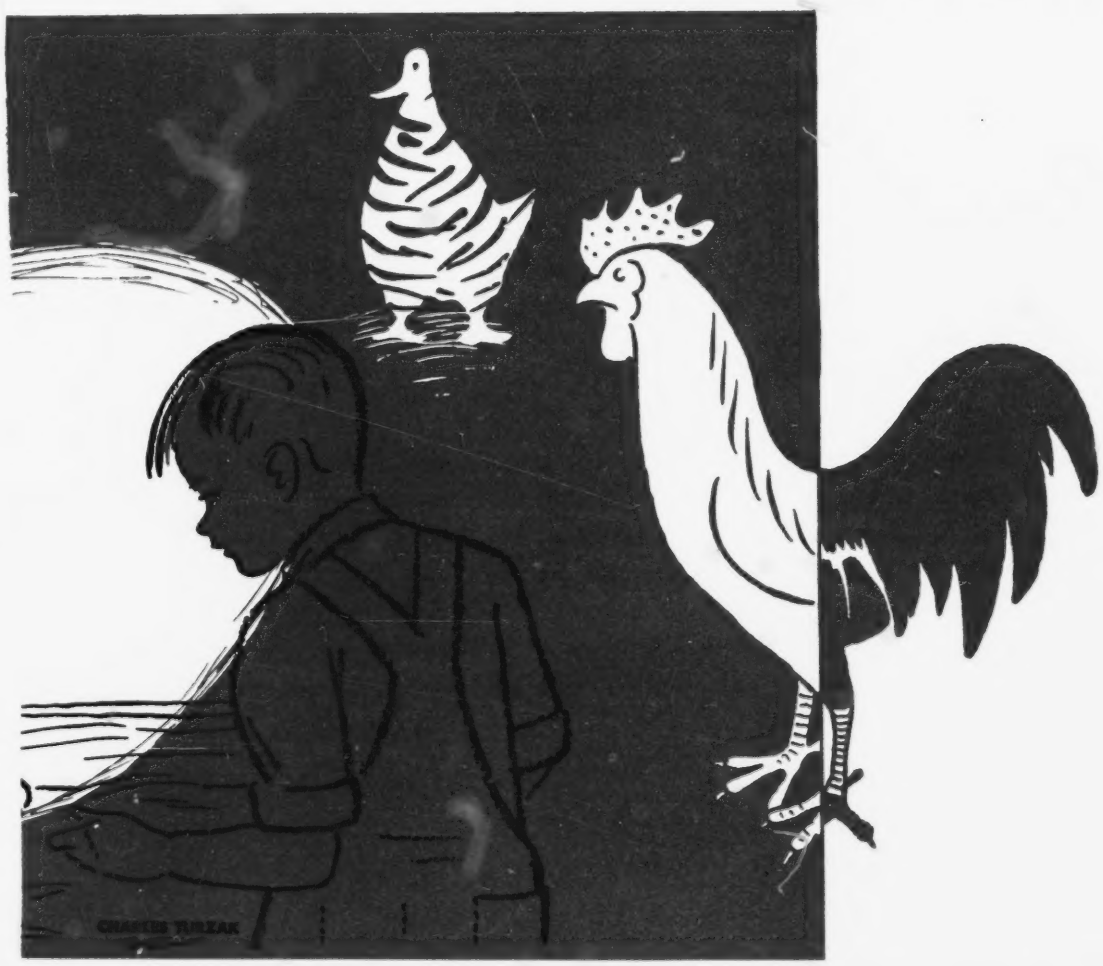
## Parents Need to Feel Right About Their Children

There is mental health value in feeling comfortable about oneself, and in feeling right about other persons. Parents who feel right about their children can provide better sex education for them.

Harry and Susan were working at "science experiments" in Harry's basement. They were spinning paper on the motor of an old fan. A relative who was visiting came hurrying to Harry's mother and said, "Those children have the light off in the basement. I think you should do some investigating." Harry's mother replied, "They are just fooling around with some science experiments. They told me all about it." But the relative insisted, "You don't know children the way I do. I'd barge in on them." Harry's mother felt right about her son, and she knew that Susan was a good companion for him.

Parents will feel more comfortable about their children and more competent to guide them in sex education if they understand how children develop from babyhood. They need to know that the great curiosity which children have about life drives them to explore the world about them. Sometimes, to be sure, their immediate world of exploration is their own bodies or those of the opposite sex; but also they want to experiment with water, chemicals, and power. They want to explore through reading and through questioning. What the parent observes in his child's behavior should be thought of as part of the whole developing child as he lives, grows, and responds to all that is around him. The following chapter will discuss some of these aspects of child development.





Chapter 3

# SOME ASPECTS OF CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

## There Are Levels of Development

Mothers and fathers do not need a book to tell them that little babies become increasingly wriggling little creatures who come to do more and more with their hands, get better and better at muscular coordination, and increasingly explore toys, their cribs, their own toes, ears, and mouths.

Development occurs in many areas. Some phases of it are more observable than are others. There is, of course, physical development such as is indicated by an increase in a child's height and weight. There is motor development; for example, children creep before they walk, and they walk before they skip. There is emotional development. Emotions are less well controlled in the young child than in children of school age. There is sexual development in children, too, and this should be considered as natural and normal as any other phase of child growth and development.



Sometimes parents judge children by adult standards and so have false notions of what should occur at certain ages. They may be disturbed by a child's negativism at about the age of two, as manifested by his unwillingness to cooperate with others. He may seem to them to be a naughty child. Some parents consider that any manifestation of sex in babies or young children is unnatural, and they may be dismayed to notice that young babies can have an erection of the penis. This is especially likely to happen when the baby boy has a full bladder. It does not mean that anything is the matter with him.

It is sometimes reassuring for parents to study some of the various developmental stages of children. Although children do go through the same general stages in their total progress, they do not always achieve the same level of development at identical ages. It is a mistake to try to associate definite behavior with definite ages, but in order to see a total sequence it is possible to describe progress in terms of the very young child of about two and three, the nursery

and kindergarten child of about four and five, and the elementary school child of about six, seven, and eight. Of course, parents know that children differ, and they also should understand that there is no magic in these very general age groupings.

The following outline is in three sections corresponding to these three age groupings of the young child. It represents only a small part of total development, and touches on only a few of the areas in which development occurs. It is intended to be suggestive material and not inclusive. Moreover, our knowledge of child development keeps on growing and changing. More material on the subject can be found in some of the books listed on page 47.

ABOUT THE AGE OF TWO OR THREE THE CHILD SHOWS AFFECTION FOR PARENTS

Mother may be the favored one

May give hugs and kisses spontaneously

(This is an important step in relating to other persons.)

IS LEARNING TO PLAY

May be with others, but not share with others until around the age of three

(Adult standards of politeness cannot yet be understood and should not be enforced.)

HAS LITTLE SENSE OF MODESTY

May bathe and dress freely in front of others

(Enforcing modesty at this age may create confusion for the child.)

HAS A GREAT CURIOSITY

Feels and manipulates objects, household equipment, own blankets, toy animals, sex organs; may play with own excretions
Begins to ask questions, some just to keep the conversation going
Asks about airplanes and how they work, about babies and when there will be one or asks from where they come. Asks about differences between sexes

(A child's curiosity extends to all areas of his experience.)

BECOMES AWARE OF HIS OWN INDIVIDUALITY

Asserts himself—says "no" to many things, cries loud and hits

(A child's awareness of himself as a person is important in learning to relate to others.)

ABOUT THE AGE OF FOUR AND FIVE THE CHILD

MAY SHOW AFFECTION IN DIFFERENT WAYS



Romantic attachments toward parents may begin—boys love mother, girls love father, and may say, "I'm going to marry you." Children may identify themselves with the parents of the same sex and imitate activities

(The role of father and mother is being learned.)

MAY SHOW INCREASED MODESTY

May insist on privacy in bath

(A child's attitude toward privacy in the bath, etc., may be influenced by his experiences in nursery school and kindergarten.)

MAY DEVELOP MORE INTENSE CURIOSITY

Often asks searching questions about many things including birth. Reasks questions

(There is so much that is new to ask about that questions dominate.)

PLAYS MORE WITH OTHER CHILDREN

Creative play begins. Dramatizes the care of babies. There may be "doctor" and "nurse" play.

Verbal play is common. Likes songs and rhymes, uses mild obscenities

Still plays equally with both sexes

(Play reflects the child's attempt to find his place in an adult world, and some activities may be shocking to the parents.)

DEVELOPS MORE INITIATIVE

May take responsibility for selecting own wearing apparel

Plans many play activities

(Is beginning to develop the self-competence that will eventually allow him to become independent.)

BEGINS TO SHOW A DEVELOPING CONSCIENCE

Sense of fair play begins

(A child begins to know what is right and wrong.)

ABOUT THE AGE OF SIX, SEVEN, AND EIGHT THE CHILD MAY BE MORE RESTRAINED IN AFFECTION

May not be able to accept expressions of affection such as hugs and kisses, but wants love

(May be mixed up in his emotions toward mother—sulky, sensitive, argumentative at times.)

WILL CONTINUE TO SHOW CURIOSITY

Asks questions about body structure and function

Sex exploration and masturbation may occur

May ask about father's part in reproduction

Learns much from his age group

Interested in books, and films about planes, space, animal birth and natural events

(Needs to check new learnings with the family because of conflicting information.)

PLAYS WITH THE GANG

Uses their slang and vulgar words

Wants to dress like the gang

(This is the beginning of a period in which own sex will be chosen for friends.)

MAY SHOW A PRONOUNCED MODESTY AND DESIRE FOR PRIVACY



Some children insist upon more privacy than earlier

(Customs of school, and of friends, and also family experiences make frequent variations.)

IS CONCERNED ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG

Has a clearer understanding of what is right

Asks permission to use other's property

(Guilt feelings and worries may come if child knows that he fails to meet standards.)

Many of these threads of development will continue throughout life. For example, play, which was mentioned in each of the three stages of the preceding outline, meets basic needs of adults as well as children. Similarly, curiosity may wane at some ages because one has mastered large segments of knowledge, but it never disappears in a healthy adult. Feelings of right and wrong which are elementary in children later become the basis for a mature sense of values including sexual ethics. Furthermore, the child's capacity to give and receive affection, which has its beginnings in earliest infancy, will be a part of him throughout life. In its changing expressions, it will be closely intertwined with his sexual development, as he

passes from baby love to love of husband and wife for each other and for their children.

It is encouraging for parents to know also that children do not always remain at some of the earlier levels of behavior. Children do stop their "toilet talk," for example, just as surely as they eventually become toilet trained or learn to tie their shoe laces and to comb their hair neatly. Trying to hurry the growth process can have unfavorable results. We are learning that too early weaning is unsound, that too early toilet training is a mistake and that the early enforcing of adult standards in the area of sex is confusing to young children. Many parents hurry their children along more because they are personally embarrassed by what the children do and say, than because they have honestly decided that the child's behavior is bad for him. Comparison with other children is a poor way, too, to decide what is good behavior, for no two children are exactly alike.

## No Two Children Are Exactly Alike

Those who study children and family life say not to compare individuals, for each is his own self, a product of his own family, with his family's heredity, attitudes, and way of life. Each is influenced by his own group of friends and by the way his parents feel about them. Various other intangible relationships affect the personality. We know that some children are quiet and say very little. Others talk freely about anything at any time. Some children develop more slowly than others. Johnny may walk at age one and tie his shoe laces at age four. Bill may not walk until he is two and may not tie his laces until the age of six, and Sally, at the age of four, may be noisier and more active than any of her playmates. Thus, although we can talk about general developmental patterns which guide us in knowing that most children do certain things at some time in their early years, we cannot become rigid about what to expect at a given age. Parents must accept each developmental stage, and if they can feel right about their child at any stage of development, they will be better able to help him feel right about himself and about others as he grows toward maturity.

Chapter 4

# THE SETTING FOR TALKING ABOUT SEX

## Encourage Two-Way Talk

Although we said earlier that words are not the only way to give information, we cannot overlook the fact that conversation is an excellent means of communication. Through conversation, parents can get across to their children what they would like to have them learn, but what is more important, in two-way conversations parents can learn from their children. In sex education it is very necessary for adults to know what puzzles their youngsters or to hear about the fantasies that often persist in young children's thinking even when sound information has been given to them. Some children continue to think they were born through the navel, even though they have been told the truth. Some also insist they were adopted, even though they hear over and over about their birth and babyhood.



Modern family life is not always conducive to leisurely conversations. Community life, work both within and outside the home, and social life take the time of many parents. School, clubs, and other recreational activity, including TV, take up a considerable amount of a child's time. Even family events such as outings, excellent as they are for family life in general, do not always afford enough intimacy for private chats. Parents may well make time for the chummy little two-way visits that give a young one in the family the feeling of being close to an adult who can talk just to him about very important matters—and these are not all about birth! Mothers and fathers who read to their children and stop to talk leisurely about funny bits or educational pieces foster two way communication, as also do those who go on "slow pace" exploratory walks with their children.

## Sex Questions Come When Lines Are Open

In homes where conversations about many interesting matters can occur naturally, questions about birth are likely to occur easily. When children do not ask questions, it is always well for parents to ask themselves whether there has really been the opportunity. Sometimes, to be sure, children get a kind of general information through

observation and conversation with friends and have no special curiosity to learn more about sex at the particular time. Again, a child may have been "shushed" in front of guests or in some other way been made to feel that he should not ask the questions he has in mind. Others who ask no questions perhaps have not had an opportunity to ask at the time that the question came to their mind.

Sex is not *all* important for young children. Albert asked his mother if all women had breasts, and did they give milk. His mother answered him as well as she could and expected him to ply her for more facts about the process. Instead he said, "Will we get a color TV for Christmas?" Children's conversation and questions about innumerable subjects go on endlessly.

When birth is treated as a natural conversational topic, sex information can be given easily. It is well to make a special point to mention in front of young children various pleasant matters about birth such as that Mrs. Jones has just had her baby, or that it won't be long until Aunt Mary will have her baby, and so forth. Some persons who have graduated from the old-fashioned custom of whispering about birth still have not grasped the real need for treating reproduction as a natural topic of conversation.

## You Won't Need to Be the Perfect Teacher



Perfect instruction is no more necessary in sex education than in any other subject. When we give information about any natural phenomena such as rain, the sea, the stars, do we ever tell all, or can we ever tell all? Even if we could, we would not need to. In a recent survey, young boys thought their parents quite ignorant when it came to explaining how cars, airplanes, and TV worked, but they still learned from them. The important thing is *how* we tell what we do tell, and, as in all learning, we need to repeat again and again, for one telling usually does not suffice.

It is far more important to be truthful, consistent, relaxed and brief than to be discursive, complete, and uneasy, for a child forgets much of the information that is given him and then re-asks questions time and again as he needs more information. It is important for a child to have the assurance that his parents are willing to answer his questions and that he has the right to ask them. Children learn in relation to the level of development at which they are. In the next section there is a discussion of some questions which parents frequently ask about sex education.

Chapter 5

# SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING SOME COMMON QUESTIONS AND SITUATIONS

## 1. QUESTIONS CHILDREN ASK

### Children's questions about birth

Children's questions about birth come in various ways and at various ages. Parents, in an easy, natural way need to hold to the point of view that babies grow in their mothers. From time to time young children will re-ask their questions about birth, and if parents have simple physiological material well in mind they can add new material suited to successive levels of development of a child. The physiological material on page 16 should prove helpful.

Billy had been brought up in a house where conversations about babies were handled easily and without emotion. When he was about three and half his father had told him that babies grow in their mothers for a time. This conversation occurred because one of his bedtime stories referred to a stork's bringing a baby elephant to a mother elephant who wanted a baby very much. The child had pointed to the stork and said questioningly, "The stork brings the baby?" His father said, "This is just a make-believe story, Billy. Mother elephants make their own little babies. They grow inside the mother elephant. Children also grow as babies inside their mothers in a special place near the mother's tummy until they are ready to be born. A mother stork has a baby stork, an elephant has a baby elephant, and a mother has a little boy or girl. Your mommy carried you in a special place near her tummy until you were born."



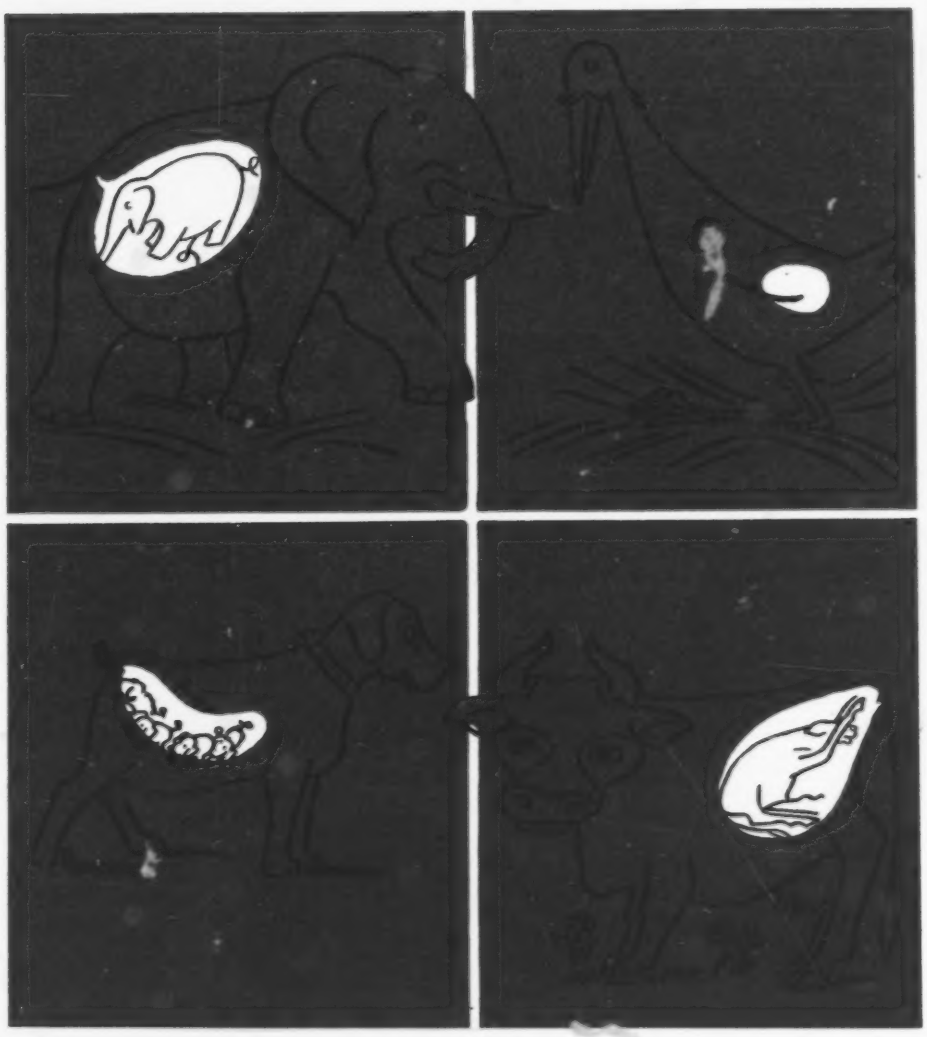
This child was able at three and half to carry on a conversation with his parents about matters that interested or puzzled him. Some children might carry on this conversation at a slightly earlier age. Some do not ask for sex information until several years later.

### A little at a time

Situations in which there can be an easy, natural conversation

about birth frequently arise, and it is both easy and useful to talk with a young child about these matters a little at a time. Tommy's mother says that she cannot remember any special session that she had with him about birth. She and her husband kept giving information as he asked for it. Once he inquired about a neighbor who had come home from the hospital with her baby. Again, he asked about how a friend of his knew he was going to have a new brother or sister. Once he inquired about a film he had seen on television which aroused his curiosity. His mother recently told a parent discussion group about the following conversation which she had with Tommy at the age of seven.

Someone had referred to the late President Roosevelt, and Tommy asked, "Was I alive when he was? I don't think I was." His mother said, "No. You were not yet born. I well remember, because the day he died I was walking up the boulevard to take your brother to the movies. It was a long walk, and I was tired. You were quite a big load then. Mrs. Marr called out to us about the President, and we stopped there to rest. You were born in July. That was in April, so I had been carrying you six months."



Tommy asked, "Did you feel many kicks about then?" His mother told the group that she could not remember when she first told him about a child's movements in his mother. The whole process had been very gradual. She then assured him that he had been no trouble to her during pregnancy, and remarked that his older brother had been interested to feel the baby's movements by placing his hand upon her abdomen. You may already have anticipated what his next question was to be. He asked, "Will I ever have a baby brother or sister?" Tommy's mother answered his question by saying, "No. We probably won't have any more babies in our family. You see, I was married later than some women and mothers of my age aren't so likely to have babies. Just think, it was seven years ago that we had

you." She was wise to keep from giving him complicated information which he probably did not want anyway about fertility, or about economic and emotional factors in regard to late pregnancies. Good teaching at home, as in school, should proceed on the basis of a little at a time when the time is right, and over again as needed.

### How can the baby get out?

Children are quick to ask how the baby gets out of the mother, and for very young children it may suffice to say, "through a special opening between the mother's legs." Some parents are shocked and embarrassed to have a child ask to see the opening. There should be no shock at the question (even though one should not comply with the request), for today's children have been reared in a culture which encourages trips, e.g., to the museum, to the dairy, to the firehouse, all for the purpose of seeing "how." Mothers can answer a child's request by saying, "I could draw a picture, or we could look at some pictures in a book."

Even after the child has had a question answered carefully he may still cling to some special interpretation of his own. It is a good idea for parents to try to find out what a child believes so that they can help straighten out that which puzzles him. Sometimes a conversation about how the baby gets out of the mother will confuse or trouble a child unless care is taken to explain how the body stretches in many ways to permit the baby to grow and to be born. The parent may use as much of the material on page 18 as the child can understand.



It is well for adults to avoid conversations in front of children about suffering greatly in labor or about being torn by the birth process, for children sometimes feel guilty about having caused their mother pain and discomfort. Also, a child may carry into his adult role of father or mother a fear of birth. When children ask if it hurts to have a baby the answer can be something like this. "There is a pain which is something like a tummy ache because muscles are working hard to bring the baby down to the special opening to be born, but the pain is soon forgotten because babies like you (and be sure to add the children in the family so that none will be slighted), are so much fun to have!"

### When should the child know he will have a brother or a sister?

Some parents ask how far in advance of the child's arrival they should tell older children that there will be an addition to the family.

A mature child of eight can perhaps go through most of the mother's pregnancy easily and learn from each phase of it, but younger children cannot comfortably wait a long time. On the other hand, it is very unwise to keep the news of a new baby from children and then dash off to the hospital with little warning. Some mothers wait until their appearance is conspicuous, but in any event, four months is long enough for the five year old to wait, and it is probably too long for a three year old to be in suspense.

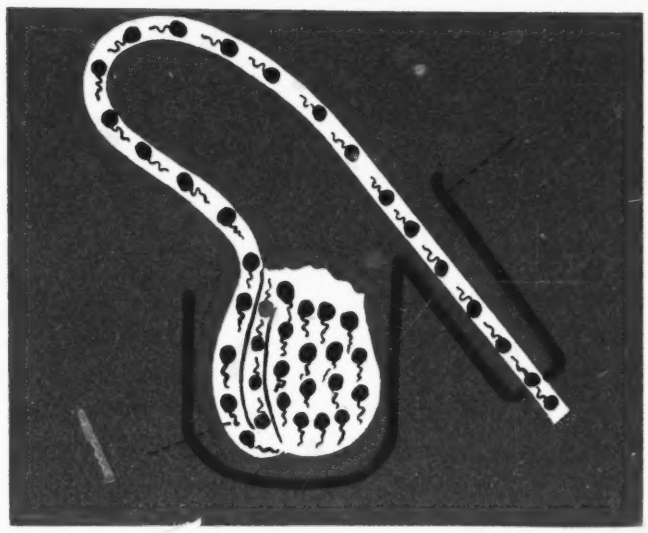
As soon as the parents decide to tell the young child about the event they should begin to interpret the meaning of pre-natal visits to the doctor. Many children today are used to the idea of seeing the doctor and dentist in an effort to keep well. The child can easily grasp the fact that the mother wants to be sure she is getting the right food and so forth. The child should be told that the same doctor will be with her when it is time for the baby to be born because the mother will want his help then in making her comfortable. He should know that the hospital has been chosen because it has all kinds of equipment for new babies and there are nurses who know a great deal about caring for babies when they are very young. It is most important that the child does not get the idea that his mother is ill or that the baby will be in danger.



### The father's part

Some parents have little trouble explaining to children that babies grow in their mothers, but they become extremely disturbed about explaining the father's part in reproduction. They may even avoid giving this information until the child has brought in a new kind of vocabulary and demands explanation of the words he has heard. Parents who are sincerely interested in their children's sex education have a real conflict to resolve when they know that their children are learning about sex when they are too young to understand all that is involved in a marriage relationship. To be sure, it is difficult for children of five or six, and definitely difficult for younger ones, to understand the feeling that a husband and wife have for one another and the way in which they can express their love through sexual intercourse. The fact that the areas of the body which are a part of mating are usually associated in children's minds with elimination may make the act of intercourse seem unclean to them. Still, children cannot be kept from references to mating or from observation of it in animals.

If, as was said earlier, children do converse easily with their par-



ents, and if early questions have been answered truthfully and no shame has been associated with sex behavior or vocabulary, then bit by bit the father's part in reproduction can be explained to the child. There is much to be said about this subject and it is a mistake to try to undertake too much at once.

Young children may be satisfied to know that the father must start the baby growing in the mother and that he does this because his body contains a special kind of seed. When a mature child wants to know just how this is accomplished, one can explain that the seed, called sperm cells, comes from the father when his penis is placed inside the mother's vagina. In this way the seed can meet with the egg cell which the mother has.

The physiological material given on page 20 can be given to the seven- or eight-year-old who is really curious to know how the ovaries and testicles function. But by starting out with simple facts one can add and re-explain as questions indicate that the child wants to know more.



If the child is mature and shows an interest in learning about mating one should explain that fathers and mothers embrace in this way because of their love for one another. They want to be close because of this love. Parents will need to deal in their own way with their children's response to this information. For example, a child may say, "I never want to get married." Or he may say, "When can I do that?" or "Do boys marry their mothers?" or "I just want to marry you." The main guide to dealing with these questions is that one does not laugh at them, get shocked at them, shame the child for asking them or say that they should be dealt with later. One can quietly tell the child that some day he will be grown up and love someone very much and have his own family, but of course he is not ready yet, just as he has not even grown as tall as he will grow. Children can understand physical growth because it is apparent.

### The place of religion in sex education

Many questions that children ask about sex can be answered constructively in a religious framework. Some fathers and mothers preface all explanations of birth with the statement that God made it possible for mothers and fathers to have babies. There can be other interpretations depending upon the beliefs and convictions of individual parents, but whatever may be one's religious point of view, it should give support to factual material about sex.

There are many points at which religious teachings may strengthen family life. For example, little children learn that we should love one another. Religious beliefs of many faiths highlight the importance of love in the family. Generally those in our society who seriously apply the teachings of their church to daily life experiences strive to maintain faithfulness to a marriage partner and try to carry responsibility in parenthood.

Parents can lay the foundations of a successful marriage for their children only if they interpret sex education as more than factual content about physiology. Early teaching about sex will prove useful to young persons over and above the factual content if it has provided a concept of sex that includes tender love and respect for individual personality. Later, when children become young persons who are ready for the experience of dating and mating they will re-interpret sex information learned in earlier years, and will sense a need for determining goals and standards of sexual behavior for themselves in accordance with their own ethical and religious convictions.



It is assumed that as parents use material in this pamphlet in their own way to answer sex questions, they will integrate their own religious point of view.

## 2. PARENTS HAVE QUESTIONS, TOO

### Those words!

Parents often ask how they can best handle the situation when a young child picks up the usual "four-letter words." It is not necessary to explain all the details of sexual intercourse to a five-year-old just because he comes in with a vulgar word to describe it, for he may not ask for meanings of the words he brings in. Perhaps he uses the words because some older boys use them or because his own little gang has been sounding them out. These words often disappear from a vocabulary as suddenly as they came into it. At first they may be a badge of belonging to some group, and unless they are forbidden,

their usefulness will soon have been served. Censorship may make them more exciting.

Mr. King made a bargain with his children. They brought home all the new exciting words they picked up, and the whole family decided which ones were all right to use. He explained that it was well to try to use good English, but they all agreed that some slang expressions were good words for some occasions. Nothing too bad was left in the agreed-upon vocabulary nor were all the colorful current expressions left out. Not every one would agree with this plan, but it worked for Mr. King's children. At least Mr. and Mrs. King created the kind of relationship which made the children want to tell what they learned.

### Differences between boys and girls

Questions about the bodies of other children or the parents may come from very young children. When a little girl asks about a boy's penis she should be told that little boys have a penis because they are made differently from little girls. They urinate through the penis. Little girls have a tiny opening through which they urinate. Mothers and fathers may use other words to describe urination such as "wee-wee" or "tinkle." At the age of three, for example, children do not need a lecture on reproduction and the use of the penis in mating. If it were possible for all pre-school children to see children of the opposite sex in natural situations, such as taking a bath, or undressing together, or urinating in a different manner, their differences could be accepted easily.



Sometimes children feel cheated that they do not have what others have. Parents should never threaten a boy with the loss of his penis, nor through stories and laughter make a girl feel that she has been cheated in not having the same anatomy as a boy. When children ask about a mother's breasts they should be told that all grown women have them and that mothers with young babies often feed them milk from their breasts. Little girls are usually satisfied to learn that they will have breasts when they grow up, and they eagerly watch for their development. Little boys are often curious to know whether their nipples will develop into breasts such as women have. Often boys stuff their shirts to bulge in front, and jokingly impersonate women.

### Should children see their parents nude?

There are differing points of view on whether it is better for members of a family to maintain personal privacy and to insist upon

locked doors or to move about more freely in their homes without regard to the state of dress. Each family has its own patterns of living which have developed over a period of time and obviously are related to the way the adults were accustomed to behaving in their own families. A family which is informal in its way of life usually lapses easily into informality in sharing bedrooms and bathrooms. Certainly if a strictly formal family that had always insisted that covering be worn and that bathroom doors be locked were suddenly to decide that children should see their parents nude, the result might be unfortunate. However, if by accident a child comes upon a personal situation to which he has been unaccustomed, such as seeing a parent nude, the situation should be accepted calmly by the parents so that the whole event will not seem overly important to the child.

Parents in this country generally consider sexual intercourse to be a private relationship and they take pains to keep children or other adults from observing the act. Since young children do not understand what is happening they may be frightened by being in the room, and for this reason parents are advised to keep children from sleeping in their parents' room. They want to be sure that children do not get the idea that their mother is being hurt.

When a child comes into a room unexpectedly and observes his parents having sexual intercourse he may be more disturbed by their reaction to him than by what he has observed. Frequently children who awake from sleep and come into the parents' room are not fully awake, and the incident would be unimportant to them if it were not accented by obvious confusion, shame, indignation, or in some instances by humor. An older child who asks about what he has seen should be given answers to his questions about mating that are just as objective as those which he would receive if the questions were asked at any other time.



### Discovering personal equipment

Sometimes children come upon personal hygiene equipment in the household, in stores or in restrooms and ask questions of their parents. A child of any age who asks a question wishes some kind of answer. Young children of around three do not need detailed explanations of use, but older children need a straight-forward answer. The very young child who asks, for example, about sanitary pads recognizes the likeness between them and the sterile pads, gauze, and bandaids he is accustomed to seeing in his home. The child at this age is more interested to know what is in the mysterious pack-

age that is often left with its wrapper on than he is to know how they will be used. He accepts the fact that they are useful supplies. In speaking to an older child who is capable of understanding how the body functions, parents should use some such term as "sanitary pads" rather than "bandages." If a child is told that sanitary pads are "bandages" and that his mother uses them, he may think that she is ill or injured. A parent must judge how much information to give and can be guided by the child's own questions. Facts about menstruation on page 21 can be given to children who want factual information.

### What about sex play?

Fortunately there is coming to be an awareness of the fact that sex activity does not occur suddenly in adults at the time that the sex organs are ready for reproduction. Parents can understand their children better if they realize that young children also have sex curiosity and feelings, as was indicated by the outline on page 28, and that sex play is common as children pass through various stages of sexual development on the way to sexual maturity.

We know that children may get pleasure from playing with their dolls and teddy bears in ways that may have an element of sex interest, such as pretending to give them enemas or playing at taking their temperatures rectally. Children may have daydreams too, or take part in an imaginative kind of play that contains an element of sex which they may not understand. Also it is common for children of about four to nine years to take part in play in which they remove part or all of their clothing, and perhaps touch each other. Sometimes they secrete themselves in the bathroom and whisper or giggle about toilet functions.



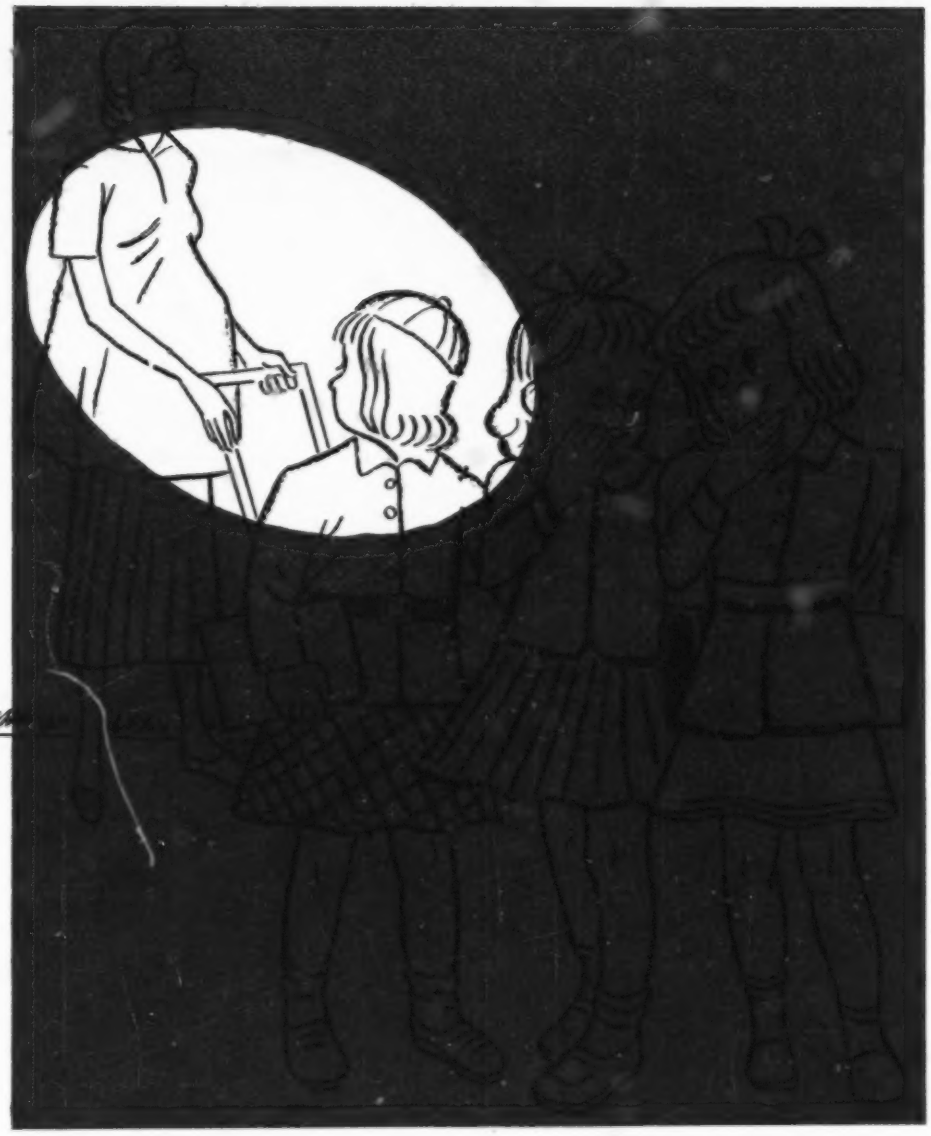
Many parents find that they can best handle such episodes if they keep calm, and in a friendly way promote some other type of play activity, without shaming the child for what he has done. Perhaps because they sense adult disapproval, children themselves often feel uneasy about sex play and are likely to feel relieved when the adult says a quiet "no" to such undressing games as "doctor," or other situations that invite sex play. Sometimes the child's unanswered questions about sex and the urge to find the answers may lead him into sex play, even though he has not put his questions into words. The parents' cue then is to answer the unspoken questions. (See Chapter 4.)

Parents sometimes discover that their children are playing with

their genitals. Babies often handle their sex organs in a casual way just as they often play with their toes or their ears. This casual bodily exploration should not disturb parents.

Older children may sometimes discover that they receive pleasure from deliberate manipulation of their sex organs. This deliberate sex play which is aimed at physical gratification is called masturbation. When such sex play is occasionally observed in a little child, it is probably best to overlook it. When possible, situations leading to it should be noted and avoided. Certainly children should not be made to feel guilty lest they carry unhappy feelings about sex into adulthood.

It is now known that masturbation occurs at some time or other in the majority of children and that it does not cause insanity or bodily harm. In extreme cases where a child is continually seen to be engaging in sex play or masturbation, the advice of a physician or a child guidance clinic should be sought, for this may be the symptom of some deep-seated unhappiness. A parent's tension about



sex play, as well as many other habits, can increase a child's tension.

Probably parents will be most helpful to the young child in this connection if they provide a happy, relaxed, loving home atmosphere, with a daily routine that offers the child interesting and absorbing things to do, while it avoids situations that might encourage sex play. They should not shame or punish the child, threaten him with dreadful consequences, or confine him physically in any way to try to stop him from touching his genitals.

For the young child, a new routine of happy activity is often a first step in overcoming the habit of sex play. Some parents report an improvement in overcoming the habit when their child has been put to bed at a time when he is ready for sleep. This means that parents need to take care that the child is neither overtired, nor, on the other hand, so wide awake that he will play in his bed for a long time. It may be helpful also to encourage the child to rise promptly when he wakens in the morning.

Parents who observe sex play in their child might well ask themselves whether he has been put under any undue strain in competing beyond his ability, or has otherwise been forced to find satisfaction within himself rather than in his daily life experiences with others. They may also need to consider whether their child has been in contact with other children, or adults, who have encouraged him to masturbate.



In general, if parents are able to understand sex play and masturbation as stages in child and youth development that will pass, they can be more relaxed in dealing with it.

### Will children tell their friends?

Often parents are concerned lest their child tell friends about the sex information that they have given him. Sometimes after beginning a good job of sex education, parents complicate the procedure by warning the child not to share the facts with others. They sometimes give this advice in a way that implies that the information is unwholesome. Children almost always share knowledge that interests them no matter what advice is given. Often what comes into one's home from children who have not had guidance in sex education will cause far greater difficulty than what goes out from a well-informed child who has had more than a "shot in the arm" of unrelated information.

Some parents have found it helpful to explain to their children that every family has its own way of bringing up children, has its own religion, and reads different books. These parents have explained to their children that it is best to let each family bring up its children in its own way. This is no guarantee that there will not be discussion among children, but it aids the child whose friends tell him things that conflict with what his parents have told him.



### What about the birds and bees?

There has been much merriment among adults over stories of the birds and the bees. For many years, too much reliance was placed on the stories of reproduction in birds, animals and insects. Educators now think that more emphasis should be put on the story of human reproduction, for some of the reproductive processes of animals may give misleading ideas unless the child also has been told the story of human reproduction. Some schools do an excellent job of sex education in which children learn about both human and animal reproduction. Farm animals and home pets often supply useful sex information.

The most interesting story of the day, or of any day for children, is the story of how human life came to be. It will probably never be told skillfully enough to convey all the wonder of it, but parents and writers will keep on trying to relate it because children will continue to ask for it.

When children develop to the point where they can read easily for themselves, they will enjoy reading at their own speed a booklet about themselves. A pamphlet in this series is available for these boys and girls. It is called "A Story About You." It is written for the nine- to twelve-year-olds. Parents may want to read this too, and to read parts of it to children who want to read about themselves, but cannot master all the text.

**For the parents' own use:**

*Attaining Manhood and Attaining Womanhood,* both books by George W. Corner, M.D., Harper & Brothers, New York, 1952.

*The Encyclopedia of Child Care and Guidance,* edited by Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, Doubleday, New York, 1963.

*What to Tell Your Children About Sex,* Child Study Association of America, 9 East 89th Street, New York, New York 10028, 1964.

*Helping Boys and Girls Understand Their Sex Roles,* by Milton I. Levine and Jean H. Seligmann, Science Research Associates, Chicago, 1967.

**For use with children:**

*A Baby Is Born,* by Milton I. Levine, M.D. and Jean Seligmann, Golden Press, New York, 1966.

*The Wonderful Story of How You Were Born,* by Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, Doubleday, New York, 1952. This book can be read to young children. Some young school children will be able to read parts of it.

*The Story of a Baby,* by Marie Ets, Viking Press, New York, 1948.

Additional information on sex, sex education and sexual behavior may be obtained from the following sources:

Child Study Association of America, Inc.
9 East 89th Street
New York, New York 10028

Sex Information and Education Council
of the United States (SIECUS)
1790 Broadway
New York, New York 10019

30c each

OP12

Printed in the U.S.A.

50 to 99 — 28c each
100 to 499 — 25c each
500 to 999 — 23c each
1,000 or more — 20c each